

# Traffic Safety Facts

## Laws

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## Bicycle Helmet Use Laws

The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) supports the enactment of bicycle helmet usage laws. Bicycle helmets offer bicyclists the best protection from head injuries resulting from bicycle crashes, and bicycle helmet laws have been proven effective in increasing bicycle helmet use.

### Key Facts

- More than 47,000 bicyclists have died in traffic crashes in the United States since 1932, the first year that bicycle fatality estimates were recorded.
- In 2001, 728 bicyclists were killed, and approximately 45,000 were injured in traffic-related crashes. Children aged 14 and under accounted for 137 (19 percent) fatalities, making this one of the most frequent causes

of injury-related death for young children.

- Each year, nearly 400,000 children aged 14 and under are treated in emergency rooms for bicycle-related injuries.
- Universal bicycle-helmet use by children aged 4 to 15 would prevent 39,000 to 45,000 head injuries, and 18,000 to 55,000 scalp and face injuries annually.
- Bicycle helmets are 85 to 88 percent effective in mitigating head and brain injuries, making the use of helmets the single most effective way to reduce head injuries and fatalities resulting from bicycle crashes.
- Despite the fact that 70 to 80 percent of all fatal bicycle crashes involve head injuries, only about 20 to 25 percent of all bicyclists wear bicycle helmets.
- Nationally, bicyclists aged 14 and under are at five times greater risk for injury than older cyclists.
- As with safety belts, child safety seats, and motorcycle helmets, enacting laws requiring the use of bicycle helmets, along with education and visible enforcement, is likely to be the most promising way to increase bicycle helmet usage.

### Legislative Status

- The first bicycle helmet law was passed in California in 1986 and became effective in 1987. This

law was amended in 1994 to cover anyone under age 18.

- As of October 2002, 20 States (including the District of Columbia) have enacted age-specific bicycle helmet laws. Most of these laws cover bicyclists under age 16.
- H.R. 965, the Child Safety Protection Act of 1994, required the Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC) to develop a mandatory bicycle helmet standard.
- On March 10, 1998, the CPSC published a final rule establishing 16 CFR Part 1203, Safety Standard for Bicycle Helmets, which applies to bicycle helmets manufactured after March 10, 1999. The standard mandates several performance requirements including:
  - ◆ **Impact protection in a crash:** The standard establishes a performance test to ensure that helmets adequately protect the head in a collision or a fall.
  - ◆ **Children's helmets and head coverage:** The standard specifies an increased area of head coverage for children aged 1 to 5.
  - ◆ **Chinstrap strength and stability:** The standard establishes a performance test to measure chinstrap strength to prevent breakage

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or excessive elongation, and the helmet's resistance to rolling off the head during a collision or fall.

In addition, helmets meeting the standard must have a label indicating that they meet the CPSC's safety standard.

## Cost Savings

- The estimated annual cost of bicycle-related injuries and deaths (for all ages) is \$8 billion.
- It is expensive to treat bicycle-related head injuries because these injuries can endure for a lifetime.
- Every dollar spent on bike helmets saves society \$30 in indirect medical costs, as well as other costs.

## Information Sources

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*Injury Control Recommendations: Bicycle Helmets.* Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 1995.

*Bicycle Helmet Use in British Columbia: Effects of the Helmet Use Law.* Foss, Robert, and Doug Beirness, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, NC, 2000.

*Bike Injury; The Facts.* National Safe Kids Coalition web site, [www.safeKids.org](http://www.safeKids.org)

## Bicycle Helmet Laws: Summary\*

Jurisdiction	Ages/Conditions	Jurisdiction	Ages/Conditions
Alabama	Under 16	Maryland	Under 16
California	Under 18	Massachusetts	Under 13
Connecticut	Under 16	New Jersey	Under 14
Delaware	Under 16	New York	Under 14
District of Columbia	Under 16	North Carolina	Under 16
Florida	Under 16	Oregon	Under 16
Georgia	Under 16	Pennsylvania	Under 12
Hawaii	Under 16	Rhode Island	Under 16
Louisiana	Under 12	Tennessee	Under 16
Maine	Under 16	West Virginia	Under 15

Source: BHSI\*\*

\*Check with your State bicycle pedestrian coordinators for county, city, and local bicycle helmet laws. \*\*Bicycle Helmet Law information from Mandatory Helmet Laws: A Summary. Bicycle Helmet Safety Institute, (BHSI) web site, [www.helmets.org](http://www.helmets.org), 2000.



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